

An Introduction to the North Carolina Oxford House Program

Mission Statement

Oxford House, Inc. exists to educate individuals and private and public entities in the benefits of the Oxford House concept of group homes for recovering substance abusers. It allocates all resources, including grant funds, property donations, and available personnel, to replicate democratically self-run and self-supported Oxford Houses to assist in the recovery of substance abusers.

Size of the Oxford House Program in North Carolina

As of February 2012 there are 148 Oxford Houses in the State of North Carolina.

Total Number Of Houses	148
Total Number Of Beds	1098
Houses For Men	108
Houses For Women	38
Houses For Women And Children	2

- Houses Are Located In 24 Counties
- Capacity Is Expanding At An Average Of Eight Houses Per Year.
- The First Two Oxford Houses Opened 1991, in Durham & Asheville, NC.
- The Most Recent Oxford House Opens in Greenville, NC March Of 2012.

Oxford House is an important housing resource for individuals in recovery in the State of North Carolina. Houses are peer-run, independent, and organized to support recovery. The success of the model is based on adherence to the three basic principles: (1) Immediate expulsion of relapsers, (2) Being run democratically by the residents and (3) Financial self-support. The Oxford House Model is listed in the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices- More information is available <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=223> . We have enjoyed great success since 1991, with the support of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services MH/DD/SAS Section.

Basics of Oxford House

The first Oxford House started in 1975 in the Washington D.C. area. That one Oxford House has grown to over 1550 Oxford Houses in 44 states, and internationally in Australia, Ghana and Canada today. Growth of the model accelerated in 1989 when Congress passed PL 100-690. The statute incorporated the basics of peer-run housing into legislation that provided funding for recovering individuals to borrow money needed to rent a house. Under the legislation, each state received a one-time amount of \$100,000 to establish a revolving loan fund for startup of peer-run housing.

The revolving fund loan is an important tool for housing start ups because most recovering individuals do not have financial resources when they are coming out of treatment. The loan (up to \$4,000) is used to cover costs such as first month rent, security deposits, and utility hookups. Houses repay the loans over a 24-month period.

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As soon as the houses began to expand nationwide, cities began trying to enforce local zoning laws relating to numbers of unrelated people living together in one house. In its defense, Oxford House began using the 1988 Fair Housing Amendments administered by HUD to fight these suits. Under the Federal Fair Housing Act, recovering addicts are considered handicapped and zoning laws may not treat unrelated individuals differently from families.

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Oxford Houses Are Based On Three Basic Principles:

- Houses are peer run.

The engine that runs the house is the weekly house meeting where each member gets a vote on issues affecting the house. The meetings cover all aspects of house business such as: the payment of bills, approval of purchases, chore assignments, and response to disruptive behavior. Members elect officers who serve for six-month terms. The weekly meetings provide each resident with a feeling of empowerment as they participate in the running of the house and a sense of community with other residents.

- Houses are self-supporting.

The residents share the total expenses for the house. Rents vary from \$360 to \$450 per month depending on the community and the underlying rental cost of the house. An individual's share of the cost includes rent, utilities, cable, food staples, cleaning supplies, revolving fund loan repayment, dues, and other expenses. The only items not covered in the weekly rent are each individual's groceries.

- There is a zero tolerance policy toward relapse.

People are asked to leave if they use alcohol or drugs. This is an important policy as experience has shown that relapse spreads quickly in a house if it is tolerated, and it begins to affect the norms for the house. However, individuals who have relapsed are encouraged to seek treatment and re-apply after a return to sobriety.

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Other Facts About Oxford Houses

- Houses interview prospective residents and then house members vote on admission. An 80% yes vote is required to accept a new resident. A house vote is the only method of admission once a house is established.
- Seven to ten people live in a house. Seven is the minimum number for a viable house due to economics. A house with seven or more members has a financial cushion while smaller houses begin to run into financial difficulties with every vacant bed. Often new members come directly from treatment and have no resources.
- House residents are expected to participate in recovery programs in the community.
- In North Carolina Oxford Houses are chartered with Oxford House Inc., the national non-profit organization. When houses are opened they receive a manual that provides all the information needed to operate a house. Included are job descriptions for house officers, how to maintain bookkeeping systems, how to run meetings, the philosophy of the model, and other topics. Experienced members of other houses and outreach staff also mentor the new house.
- Oxford Houses are good neighbors. There is an emphasis on maintenance of properties to the neighborhood norm. Houses are located in good neighborhoods in the belief that addicts do better if they don't return to a using environment. Living in a good neighborhood sets a different standard.
- Because everyone is different in the amount of time they need to become comfortable with sobriety, residents can live in an Oxford House as long as they feel a need. In North Carolina, the average length of stay for residents is 13 to 15 months. There are currently individuals who have resided in houses for ten or more years.
- Oxford Houses are rented on the open market. Oxford Houses are a good deal for owners as the rental agreement can be indefinite without breaks in occupancy. Some houses have been rented in North Carolina for nineteen years and a number of owners have purchased houses specifically for use as Oxford House rentals.
- Some Oxford Houses have closed. The typical reasons for closure are owner re-occupancy, sale of the property, excessive rent levels, lack of maintenance by an owner, and a poor location that contributes to high vacancy levels. It is rare, but occasionally a house is closed because it hasn't functioned well over a period of time.
- When three or more houses are in an area, they begin organizing locally into Oxford House Chapters. Each house elects a representative to the chapter. The chapter is the most important source of peer support to individual houses. There are currently 19 Chapters North Carolina. Chapter functions include; monthly meetings, assistance to individual houses, occasional financial support to a house, opening new houses, audits of houses when needed, promotion with treatment agencies, and social events.
- The North Carolina Oxford House State Association (NCOHSA) is another level of peer support to chapters and houses. The NCOHSA is made up of a representative of each chapter and alumni. The functions are similar to chapter functions. The NCOHSA can respond to a chapter or a house experiencing difficulty, can make loans or grants to a chapter, and helps to plan and support training events.

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- Referrals to Oxford Houses originate from a variety of sources including treatment agencies, 12 step support groups, Drug Courts, VA Hospitals, Correctional Facilities and word of mouth.
- Potential Residents should call houses directly to set up interviews.

Counselor Pre-Screening:

Substance abuse counselors are the primary source of referrals to Oxford Houses. Getting a workable match between the individual and the Oxford House is important, as residents who are disruptive and not serious about recovery can cause serious problems for a house. Counselors can be a big help if they take the time to pre-screen potential referrals. The following criteria are afforded for use.

- Is the individual willing and able to live in a shared housing arrangement? Has the individual shown reasonable behavior in an in-patient setting?
- Has the individual thought about his/her own recovery and is he/she determined for recovery?
- Does the individual have a recovery plan when he/she finishes treatment?

For more information visit the North Carolina State Oxford House website at www.oxfordhousenc.org or the national website at www.oxfordhouse.org.

For more information on the International Oxford House movement call 1-800-689-6411.